opening land routes through Wagha and Atari Border;

(b) if so, whether Government have considered the implication involved in the land route trade from the point of its vulnerability to smugglers and militants; and

(c) if so, what is the decision, if any, taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) to (c) Requests from Indian trade and Industry for opening up of land route through Wagha-Atari boder for overland trade with Pakistan are being examined, in the first place, in consultation with all concerned Government agencies.

Shortfall in Export of Spices

654. SHRIMATI BASANTI SARMA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been a shortfall in the export of spices during the current year;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are proposing to take some remedial steps to contain this shortfall; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Decline in Export of Tea

655. SHRI TARA CHARAN MAJUMDAR: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether steep decrease in export of Indian Tea has been reported during 1996-97;

(b) if so, reasons therefor with names of producing States affected from such decrease;

(c) whether Government propose to take some immediate steps to boost export of Indian tea in 1997-98 and onwards; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) and (b) No, Sir. Exports of tea from India during 1996-97 have been of the order of 162.86 million kgs. (estimated) valued at Rs. 1231.85 crores as compared to 163.65 million kgs. during 1995-96 valued at Rs. 1191.19 crores indicating thereby an inprovement in export earnings during 1996-97 despite marginal shortfall in volume of exports.

(c) and (d) Government and the Tea Board have been analysing coutry-wise exports of tea giving special attention to areas offering potential. Tea Board also acts to remove bottlenecks in exports to individual markets whenever these are noticed.

Other steps taken to increase exports of Indian Tea include (a) participation in major trade fairs/exhibitions abroad; (ii) media campaign to increase consumer awareness of speciality of Indian tea and campaign to pupularise the Tea Board's marketing symbol which stands for pure Indian tea.

Prospects of domestic vanaspati makers in Indo-Nepal Trade

656. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKERJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item which appeared in The Economic Times dated 23.8.97 captioned "Indo-Nepal Trade puts the lid on domestic vanaspati makers"; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?